



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Liberia

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Liberia is a republic. The Constitution provides for three branches of government—executive, legislative and judicial—but there has been no effective system of checks and balances, and presidents traditionally have wielded extraordinary power. Fighting between the Government and an armed insurgency known as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) intensified during the year, and was exacerbated by the emergence of a second insurgency, Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), during the early part of the year. On June 4, the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted President Charles for war crimes, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. On August 4, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a peacekeeping force, ECOMIL, to the country to serve as an interpositional force between government and rebel forces. On August 11, President Taylor resigned, and fled into exile in Nigeria. In accordance with the Constitution, Vice President Moses Blah became President. On August 18, a Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed in Accra, Ghana, that formed the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). On October 1, the U.N. commenced a peacekeeping operation in the country (UNMIL) to support the peace process set forth in the August 18 CPA. On October 14, President Blah ceded power to the NTGL, and Gyude Bryant, of the Liberian Action Party, was chosen as Chairman of the NTGL; Wesley Johnson, of the United People's Party, was chosen as Vice Chairman. The judiciary was subject to political influence, economic pressure, and corruption.

During the Taylor administration, the regular security forces included: The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); the Liberia National Police (LNP), which had primary responsibility for internal security; the LNP Special Operations Division (SOD); the Antiterrorist Unit (ATU), composed of an elite special forces group consisting of foreign nationals from Burkina Faso and the Gambia, as well as former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) combatants from Sierra Leone; and the Special Security Service (SSS), a large, heavily armed executive protective force. The NTGL dissolved the ATU and the SOD. There also were numerous irregular security services attached to certain key ministries and parastatal corporations, who did not belong to a permanent, organized military force and whose responsibilities appeared to be poorly defined. Other militia elements consisted primarily of young soldiers who were armed but not trained. These irregulars were the primary fighters during the conflict and the first line of defense—or offense—for the Government. During the year, several thousand government security forces were deployed in northern and southeastern counties fighting LURD and MODEL. As fighting intensified, security forces frequently acted independently of government authority, particularly in rural areas. Members of the security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

The country, with an estimated population of approximately 3.3 million, was very poor with a market-based economy suffering from the ravages of the civil war. Few statistics were available, but real growth probably was negative. An estimated 80 percent of the population lived on less than \$1 per day. The country also had an unemployment rate of at least 70 percent. Most of the population in urban areas survived on income generated through the informal sector, predominantly consisting of "buying and selling" clothing and household effects. Extensive looting fueled the informal economy. The internal displacement of thousands of civilians throughout the countryside, particularly in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba Counties, the prevalence of conflict, the absence of police security, and the absence of infrastructure throughout the country continued to depress the economy, despite the country's rich natural resources and potential self-sufficiency in food. Persons controlling armed men continued to exploit the country's natural resources for personal profit. Extortion was widespread in all levels of society.

Prior to the resignation of President Taylor, the Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. The security forces committed many unlawful killings, including possible summary executions, and they were accused of the disappearances of numerous persons, Particularly ethnic Mandingos suspected of antigovernment sympathies. Security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused or humiliated citizens. Prison conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Impunity was a serious problem. The Government investigated some of the alleged abuses by the security forces; however,

abusers rarely were charged or disciplined. Security forces continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention remained common. The judicial system was unable to ensure citizens' rights to due process and a fair trial. In some rural areas where the judiciary had not been reestablished, clan chieftains administered criminal justice through the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal; authorities tacitly condoned this practice. Security forces violated citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press; it detained, threatened, and intimidated journalists. Security forces restricted freedom of movement. Ritualistic killings also persisted. Security forces frequently harassed human rights monitors. Violence and discrimination against women remained problems. The welfare of children widely remained neglected, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to be practiced. Societal ethnic discrimination remained widespread, ethnic differences continued to generate violence and political tensions, and the Taylor administration continued to discriminate against groups that had opposed Taylor in the civil war, particularly the Mandingo and the Krahn ethnic groups. Forced labor persisted in rural areas. Child labor remained widespread, and there were reports of forced child labor. There were reports of trafficking.

There were no reports that the NTGL committed any serious human rights violations in its first few months in office. NTGL officials have publicly stated they would continue to work with the international community toward restructuring and reforming state and local security.

Rebels fighting in the northwest and the southeast committed numerous serious human rights abuses. Rebels fighting in the northwest and the southeast committed serious human rights abuses. The absence of independent observers in rebel-controlled areas made documentation of such abuses difficult.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were reports of political killings. Both security forces and rebel elements continued to commit unlawful killings. Human rights organizations estimated that such killings increased during the year as hundreds of civilians died in the fighting that occurred throughout the country (see Section 1.g.).

The Government was believed to be responsible for summary executions during the year. On June 4, the Government arrested Deputy National Security Minister John Yormie, Deputy Public Works Minister Isaac Vaye, Chief of intelligence at the Executive Mansion Peterson Marbiah, and Vice President Blah, and accused them of plotting a coup d'etat against President Taylor. On October 5, the Government confirmed that Yormie and Vaye were dead. The Government did not admit responsibility or elaborate on the circumstances of their deaths, and the bodies were not returned to the families. General Benjamin Yeaten was reported to have executed or supervised the execution of Yormie and Vaye. No further information regarding the welfare and whereabouts of Marbiah was available at year's end. Blah was released on June 13. Yeaten was in hiding at year's end.

There were numerous other unlawful killings during the year. On February 16, AFL First Battalion Commander Colonel Daniel K. Bracewell reportedly stabbed and killed, in public, AFL First Lieutenant Francis P.B. Sumo because Sumo deserted his post at a battlefield. Sumo's body was never returned to his family for burial. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and other human rights organizations spoke out against Bracewell's action; however, the Government did not charge him.

On March 28, an unnamed ATU officer attacked Alex Boye, a gas dealer, with a hand grenade. The grenade killed both Boye and the officer; 15 civilian bystanders, including several children, were injured. No government investigation occurred by year's end.

On May 6, government officials announced that Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie, the former commander of the disbanded RUF in Sierra Leone, had been killed while trying to enter the country from Cote d'Ivoire with heavily armed bodyguards. The Government stated that Bockarie and his bodyguards resisted arrest and opened fire on security forces, and Bockarie was killed in the crossfire. There were unconfirmed reports that President Taylor had killed Bockarie's mother, wife, and two children. On May 29, Patrick Nyema of the SOD allegedly shot and killed SSS Officer Richard Taylor, who was assigned to President Taylor's wife after Richard Taylor tried to intervene in a dispute between Nyema and a civilian in Monrovia. The Government has not produced a report of its investigation by year's end.

There were no updates in the following 2002 cases: The March killing of Harry Cooper by unknown persons; the June killing of a 6-year-old child by an ATU officer and presidential security forces; the September killing of Issac Gono by ATU officers; the September killing of John Toe by SOD policemen; the prison death of Kla Hneyene; and the July killing of Kennedy Kessely by police.

There were no further developments in the 2001 reported cases of killings by security forces.

Incidents of ritualistic killings, in which human body parts used in traditional rituals were removed from the victim, continued to be reported (see Section 2.c.).

b. Disappearance

Government security forces and rebels were responsible for numerous disappearances, including of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (see Section 1.f.). For example, between September 2002 and March, government security personnel reportedly rounded up scores of ethnic Mandingo youths from various suburbs of Monrovia, including Duala, Gardnersville, Paynesville, and Central Monrovia, on suspicion of being members of, or collaborators with, LURD. The abducted youth were taken to unknown locations, and most of them remain unaccounted for at year's end.

Chief of intelligence at the Executive Mansion Peterson Marbiah, who was arrested on June 4, remained missing at year's end (see Section 1.a.).

In September, government militia abducted 15 persons from Todee, north of Monrovia, and they remained missing at year's end.

Four teenage soccer players, Toe Bryant, Nicodemus Jacobs, Ezekiel Doekpa, and Emmanuel Johnson, who were abducted by alleged government-affiliated militia on Bushrod Island in 2002, were returned on November 23.

There were no developments in the following 2002 abductions by government militiamen: The May abduction of several ethnic Mandingos near Monrovia; the August alleged abduction of eight persons from Kolahun; the September abduction of Sangay Kanneh and Kpana Kamara in Lofa County; the December abduction of Joseph Moore on Bushrod Island; and the abduction of seventh-grader James Howe while selling goods at Paynesville Red Light market.

Rebels were also responsible for disappearances during the year. Nabil Hage, a foreign citizen, disappeared on Bushrod Island sometime between July 25 and August 4, while the island was firmly under LURD control. LURD forces were aware of his presence. Sekou Kamara, also known as General "K1," and General "Dragonmaster," was reported to have been seen wearing Hage's Army uniform. At year's end, Kamara was in hiding after he allegedly killed a fellow LURD General known as "Black Marine." LURD has yet to produce an investigation report or otherwise explain or account for Hage's disappearance, despite repeated calls by members of the international community for such an investigation and report during the year.

In early June, LURD forces allegedly attacked the Jah Tondo, VOA, and Wilson Corner Displaced Camps and abducted dozens of civilians. After the departure of Taylor administration, most persons were returned to their families; however, a few were unaccounted for.

LURD forces reportedly abducted Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone and forced them to haul loads of weapons and goods under threat of injury or death. Some were allegedly sent to the Guinean border to bring weapons into the country for LURD. Witnesses reported that those who complained of exhaustion, thirst, or hunger were shot in the feet or legs and left to bleed to death.

No developments were reported from the 2002 LURD force abductions of civilians in Dodo Village in Kolahun District, including small boys who were never seen again.

In March, 87 humanitarian workers and 5,268 refugees, returnees, and third country nationals disappeared during fighting between government forces and rebels from Cote d'Ivoire. All of the humanitarian workers from Action Against Hunger (AAH), Doctors Without Borders-France (MSF), World Food Program (WFP), U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), United Methodist Coordination on Relief (UMCOR) and Liberians United to Serve Humanity (LUSH) were later accounted for even though rebels had abducted some of them and released them across the border in Cote d'Ivoire. Most of the refugees were accounted for after showing up in Tapeta and

Greenville, but some remained unaccounted for having fled into the forests. Some of them also showed up in the Ivorian town of Zounhouen.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused and humiliated citizens. Detainees continued to charge that they were tortured while in detention particularly at a security-training base in Gbatala where victims and witnesses reported beatings, torture, killings, and sexual abuse. LURD forces overran Gbatala in early October. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government forces tortured LURD captives during interrogation in conflict zones.

David Moore and James Kollie, members of the security forces charged with the 2002 assault of lawyer Tiawan Gongole, were released and there was no further information on the case.

Security forces targeted and abused critics of the Government, including journalist, students, and human rights activists (see Sections 1.d., 1.f., and 2.a.). In June, the Media Foundation of West Africa (MFWA) stated that alleged government security forces and irregular elements targeted journalists and human rights activists in Monrovia for systematic looting, arson, and rape.

Law enforcement personnel, including the security forces, were implicated in numerous reports of harassment, intimidation, and looting (see Sections 1.f. and 1.g.). There were many credible reports that government security forces, LURD, and MODEL harassed travelers, displaced persons, and humanitarian aid workers at checkpoints throughout the country throughout the year. There have been few reports of any disciplinary actions for such harassment.

There were numerous reports that security forces raped persons during the year (see Section 1.g.).

Violent clashes among rival security personnel at times resulted in civilian injuries. In June, various units of government troops clashed in Sanoyea during which several civilians were reported killed and others injured.

Clan chieftains continued to use the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal to resolve criminal cases in rural areas. The Supreme Court ruled that trial-by-ordeal--commonly the placement of a heated metal object on a suspect's body in an attempt to determine whether the defendant is telling the truth--is unconstitutional; however, the practice continued under an executive order.

Prison conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were credible reports of unofficial detention facilities, including one at the Executive Mansion, in which detainees were held without charge and in some cases tortured. The Government did not provide detainees or prisoners with adequate food or medical care. Cells at Monrovia Central Prison were overcrowded, mostly with detainees awaiting trial. Similar conditions existed in the Barclay Training Center military stockade. In some counties, the structure that serves as a jail is a container with bars at one end. There also were reports that local officials forced prisoners to work for them.

Women, who constituted approximately 5 percent of the prison population, were held in separate cells. Their conditions were comparable to those of the male prisoners and detainees. There were no separate facilities for juvenile offenders. Women and particularly juveniles were subject to abuse by guards or other inmates. Convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial were not held in separate facilities.

The Government generally permitted the independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC often was allowed to visit persons held in prison facilities and police detention centers without third parties present and to make regular repeat visits, including to Gbatala. Access generally was denied to unofficial detention centers.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. There were fewer reports of arbitrary arrest and detention after the NTGL came into power.

Officers of the Liberia National Police (LNP) committed serious human rights offenses during the year. Police brutality against unarmed civilians was often commonplace. The police lacked adequately training and equipment. They were hardly paid and when paid, their salaries were meager. Public confidence in the LNP was completely

absent. Police officers often held detainees for long periods without charge or trial. The civilian police component of UNMIL started training a new police force in December and have commenced joint patrols around Monrovia.

Corruption was widespread during the year. The absence of salaries for government employees exacerbated the situation. Corruption was present in all sectors of society including the judiciary. Those who publicly admitted to corruption were often not charged or tried.

Impunity was also a major problem during the year. Offenders were not punished for their crimes. Government supporters who committed crimes or abused other people's rights were often allowed to go with impunity.

The Constitution provides for the rights of the accused, including warrants for arrests and the right of detainees either to be charged or released within 48 hours. Warrants were not always based on sufficient evidence, and detainees, particularly those without the means to hire a lawyer, often were held for more than 48 hours without charge. The police only have limited logistics and forensic capabilities and cannot adequately investigate many crimes, including murder cases. When the courts released known criminals for lack of evidence, police officers often arrested them again on false charges.

Security forces at times refused to produce suspects being held in detention without charges even after the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the application of human rights organizations. The NTGL had no unofficial detention centers.

Security forces arrested and detained a number of journalists, NGO members, and human rights activists during the year (see Section 2.a.). On February 10, police arrested student leader Siaffa Momoh Kpoto for causing pandemonium after riots broke out over fears that security forces were going to attack the University of Liberia (UL) campus while opposition LUP presidential candidate Charles Brumskine was there to deliver a speech. Kpoto was promoting Brumskine's speech. On February 12, he was released without charge after more than 500 students demonstrated outside the police headquarters. University authorities subsequently banned all student political activities on campus and ordered all major student political parties to leave the campus. UL was closed at year's end.

The Government also arrested religious leaders during the year (see Section 2.c.).

In July, the Government pardoned Sheikh K.M. Sackor after he was detained as an "illegal combatant."

In July, numerous persons detained without being charged as 'illegal combatants' were released during the year.

Manasuah Kollison left for a neighboring country shortly after his release from detention on July 11.

Government security forces, LURD, and MODEL detained, tortured, and killed hundreds of civilians during the year (see Sections 1.b. and 1.g.).

In October, MODEL released 28 detainees arrested in connection with the war to the ICRC.

The Constitution provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial; however, lengthy pretrial and pre-arraignment detention remained serious problems. In some cases, the length of the pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the length of sentence for the crime.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not use forced exile; however, as a result of frequent harassment and threats by the security forces, a number of student activists, opposition figures, and human rights activists fled the country due to fear for their personal safety or that of their families.

With the emergence of the NTGL, many citizens from the Diaspora (citizens afraid to return to the country when Charles Taylor was in power) have returned to the country to live and to work in varying capacities.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judges were subjected to political, social, familial, and financial pressures, and the judiciary was corrupt. Some judges and magistrates were not lawyers. The

judiciary has determined that it was not feasible to retire all judicial personnel who were not legally trained. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school and pass the bar examination. During President Taylor's administration, the executive branch continued to exert strong influence on the judiciary. For example, the Government's assertion that persons identified as "illegal combatants" have no recourse to civil courts appeared to have no basis in law. There were no reports that the NTGL exerted influence on the judiciary.

Courts regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts out of damages that they awarded in civil cases. Defense attorneys often suggested that their clients pay a gratuity to appease judges, prosecutors, and police officers to secure favorable rulings.

In August, unidentified individual looted the Parliament and judiciary, and stole documents of court proceedings from the Criminal and Supreme Courts.

The judiciary is divided into four levels, with the Supreme Court at the apex. All levels of the court system in Monrovia, including the Supreme Court, functioned sporadically. The Government was unable to revitalize the court system outside of Monrovia due to the war and a lack of trained personnel, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate funding. Although judges were assigned throughout the country, in some cases they were unable to hold court due to the war, lack of supplies, and lack of equipment. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftains remained prevalent in some localities (see Section 1.c.).

Under the Constitution, defendants have due process rights; however, in practice these rights were not always observed. Defendants have the right to a public trial and timely consultation with an attorney; however, there was no effective system to provide public defenders, especially in rural areas. Some local NGOs provided legal services to indigents and others who have no representation. There continued to be long delays in deciding cases involving juveniles.

At year's end, there were no political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right of privacy and the sanctity of the home; however, authorities regularly infringed on these rights. Although the Constitution provides that the police must obtain a warrant or have a reasonable belief that a crime is in progress, or is about to be committed, before entering a private dwelling, police and paramilitary officers frequently entered private homes and churches without warrants to carry out arrests and investigations. Police also raided the offices of newspapers during the year (see Section 2.a.).

Police used so-called security sweeps to search for dissidents in the Paynesville area after LURD rebels allegedly distributed leaflets there, and several persons abandoned their homes and moved in with relatives. Throughout the year, government troops carried out cordon and search operations in various neighborhoods around Monrovia including Paynesville, Gardnersville, and Bushrod Island.

In rural areas, particularly in remote parts of Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties, members of the security forces generally were paid and provisioned inadequately and often extorted money and goods from citizens. Armed security forces and rebels illegally entered homes, most often to steal food, money, or other property, usually after clashes. Local communities were compelled to provide food, shelter, and labor for members of the security forces stationed in their villages.

ATU members, government irregular forces, and LURD elements increasingly were involved in criminal activities such as theft, looting, and killings in Monrovia. The looting of humanitarian supplies during the June to August crisis was a serious problem, and many hospitals were targeted. Few, if any, perpetrators were apprehended.

The security forces harassed and threatened opposition figures and their families by conducting illegal surveillance. Some journalists and human rights activists resided in the homes of friends or relatives at times due to fear that the security forces might follow through with their threats against them. Incidents of harassment and threats increased with the continuing violence in the northwest.

There continued to be reports that students were under security forces surveillance and that security forces monitored e-mails.

There were reports that security forces and rebels forcibly conscripted men and boys to fight in the conflict in Lofa County (see Sections 2.d. and 5). In April, the Government promulgated a controversial regulation that mandated

that male IDPs be screened and taken to camps more than 62 miles from Monrovia. Several young men rounded up from the various IDP camps in the western suburbs of Monrovia have yet to be returned to their families.

The Government continued the occasional practice of arresting family members to persuade a suspect to turn himself in.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Violations of Humanitarian Law in Internal and External Conflicts

Fighting between the Government and LURD intensified during the year, and was exacerbated by the emergence of a second insurgency, MODEL, during the early part of the year. Most towns with significant populations experienced conflict, including Ganta, Gbarnga, Tubmanburg, Greenville, Buchanan, Zwedru and Harper. The fighting culminated with three LURD incursions on Monrovia from June through August, marked by intense urban combat that killed and injured hundreds of civilians, and MODEL's occupation of Buchanan at the end of July. Thousands more were displaced during the fighting, and serious health and sanitation problems arose in the greater Monrovia area as established camps for IDPs were disbanded and persons crowded into Monrovia. As of year's end, the Government was only in control of places UNMIL has deployed, including the Greater Monrovia area, Tubmanburg, Gbarnga, and parts of Nimba County. At year's end, humanitarian organizations reported continued frequent skirmishes between the former government fighters, LURD, and MODEL irregulars throughout the countryside, most seriously in Nimba County. No perpetrators were arrested or convicted for any killings connected to the conflict.

Until June, there continued to be credible reports that government forces, particularly the ATU, as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group, continued to harass, intimidate, detain, and kill member of the Mandingo ethnic group and other suspected LURD supporters.

There were numerous unlawful civilian killings committed during the year by security forces and rebel elements. These killings increased as the fighting spread throughout the country. During the year, government armed elements and uncontrolled rebels killed an undetermined number of civilians, who were suspected of being government or rebel sympathizers respectively, by shooting them, burning them alive, or cutting their throats. Some soldiers killed civilians while looting their villages. Human rights monitors reported that abuses included torture and rape.

On December 9, predominantly armed government irregulars that left Camp Schieffelin during an UNMIL disarmament exercise killed at least five persons during a 5-day looting spree. Those killed were believed to have been looters. No investigation occurred by the NTGL by year's end.

There were no further developments in the 2002 attack by alleged government security forces on Kiatahun who reportedly burned 65 of the 125 abducted civilians alive in a house in Lofa County.

There were reports that MODEL rebels killed civilians in Greenville and Harper after capturing these towns from government forces. MODEL fighters summarily executed scores of civilians believed to be government sympathizers. MODEL fighters also reportedly kill officials of Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP). MODEL fighters were also reported to have killed persons in River Gee County on suspicion of being members of the progovernment River Gee Defense force.

Rebels were responsible for numerous killing during the year. For example, Between July 21 and August 11, LURD forces occupying Bushrod Island allegedly killed, in public, several persons they believed were members of government security forces. Witnesses also reported seeing a number of bodies in the streets of Bushrod Island that appeared to have been killed deliberately, as opposed to accidentally during fighting. On August 6, three bodies were seen near Vai Town Hardware stores, in the southern end of Bushrod Island, an area firmly under LURD control. One body had been stripped, the hands were bound with wire, and there was a bullet wound in the back of the head. The other bodies were clothed but there were gunshot wounds in the head. On August 8, there were several bodies floating in the water at the port, which was under LURD control, and one in a warehouse. There are unconfirmed reports of a far greater number of such alleged deliberate killings in areas controlled by LURD during that period. All appeared to have been shot in the head or back. LURD did not produce investigation reports regarding these matters by year's end.

On August 22, LURD-affiliated ex-combatants allegedly killed General Moses Fayiah Senneh of former President Taylor's forces in Logan Town, on Bushrod Island.

There were numerous attacks on IDPs and IDP camps during the year. Between March and June, government irregulars and LURD elements repeatedly raided IDP camps in the Western suburbs of Monrovia. Humanitarian organizations reported that civilians were killed in some of these raids. Neither the Government nor LURD has investigated these matters.

On July 21 and 25, mortar rounds dropped in a foreign Embassy compound killed IDPs, including women, children, and elderly persons. One foreign Embassy employee, James Koryan, was killed in the attack. The bodies of those killed were piled in front of the Embassy to draw the attention of the international community for assistance in ending the crisis.

In June and July, mortars apparently launched by LURD elements on Bushrod Island, landed in Greystone compound in the Mamba Point neighborhood, killing numerous displaced persons and other civilians that had sought refuge in the compound and surrounding environs. LURD, which was employing mortars in its combat against government forces, denied the attacks and blamed them on government forces stationed in the nearby Ducor Hotel.

On July 25, LURD rebels launched mortar shells that landed on the Newport High School campus, which housed several hundred IDPs. Eight IDPs died and several others were injured during the 10-minute span when more than 30 shells landed around the Newport Street and Mamba Point areas. Several others were killed in various locations by the shells.

On July 25, 25 persons were killed in and around a Holiday Inn on Carey Street in Central Monrovia where 200 hundred civilians had gone to seek refuge, according to Holiday Inn owner Mr. H.M. Jawary.

On July 26, mortars fell on Greater Refuge Church in Monrovia where an estimated 300 persons sought refuge. Five persons were killed and several persons were injured.

Civilians were killed during fighting between government and rebel forces. For example, on October 1, five persons were killed during a firefight between security and LURD forces in the Paynesville and Red Light neighborhoods of Monrovia, following an attempt by President Blah and LURD Chairman Sekou Conneh to meet at Blah's residence. The meeting never occurred. Afterwards, LURD and government forces exchanged recriminations regarding who bore responsibility for triggering the incident. Neither the Government nor LURD has investigated further.

At times, it was difficult to determine who was responsible for killings. On February 28, unknown assailants killed Emmanuel Sharpolu, Musa Keita, and Kaar Lund, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) humanitarian aid workers, when their vehicle was ambushed in Grand Gedeh County near Toe Town. The Government and rebel officials exchanged recriminations regarding the deaths. Despite heavy international pressure, the Government took no action by year's end.

Sexual violence and rape was common. In August, within 1 week, 40 women and 20 girls reported being raped in the Samuel Doe Stadium in Monrovia, where as many as 50,000 IDPs lived. The perpetrators often entered the camp disguised as displaced civilians. One local NGO reported that between June 5 and August 27, they treated 626 victims of rape. In northern Bong County, the rape of young boys reportedly was on the rise.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice. Security agents threatened, detained, and assaulted journalists and intimidated many journalists into practicing self-censorship. Cabinet ministers periodically objected to critical articles and forced stories to be dropped or modified. However, from July until year's end, harassment and censorship of the media decreased significantly.

Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not arrest critics of the state of emergency during the year.

There was no further information on the trial of New Deal Movement Chairman Nigba Wiaplah, who was arrested in 2002 on charges of "inciting insurrection" for criticizing the state of emergency.

In Monrovia there were 18 newspapers that published during the year, with varying degrees of regularity. Two were

independent dailies and five usually appeared at least once a week. Their political orientation ranged between pro-government and critical of the Government. The Public Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism published one newspaper, and the communications network owned by the President published a weekly newspaper. After President Taylor left the country, his newspaper stopped publishing and his radio station stopped broadcasting.

Newspaper availability fluctuated during the year. All newspapers were printed through one printing facility. The Taylor administration had at times pressured the managers of the facility not to print articles the Government perceived to be unfavorable. To meet the costs of production, the typical newspaper's eight pages included two or three pages of advertisements or paid announcements. Some articles were the result of gifts or money that supplemented reporters' meager salaries.

Due to the high price of newspapers, the high rate of illiteracy (estimated at 75 percent), high transportation costs, and the poor state of roads elsewhere in the country, newspaper distribution generally was limited to the Monrovia region. As a result, radio was the primary means of mass communication. There were a number of FM stations in Monrovia. There also was the state-run national station (ELBC), a FM station operated by President Taylor's private Liberia Communications Network (LCN), which closed after Taylor left. There were at least five new FM stations on the airwaves: Power FM, King's FM, UNMIL Radio, and Radio LIJ. ELBC, and Radio Veritas, which was operated under the Catholic Archdiocese, also broadcast on short-wave frequencies strong enough to reach all parts of the country. In November, Chairman Bryant lifted the ban on Star Radio, an independent radio station closed by former President Taylor in 2000. DC-101 was broadcasting at year's end, and UNMIL Radio also began broadcasting in December.

Due to the economic situation in the country and the dependence on generators requiring expensive fuel, most stations limited broadcast hours and in some cases ceased operation for short periods, was particularly during the June to August crisis.

Call-in radio talk shows were popular and frequently a forum for both government and opposition viewpoints. Interviews with prominent persons were broadcast frequently. DC-101 removed its popular talk show DC Talk off the air after government operatives threatened the show's host and the station management for condoning and preaching anti-government sentiments.

Television was limited to those who could purchase sets, the generators, and fuel to provide electricity. For those persons and businesses with satellite capability, CNN was generally available. There were two television stations: LCN, owned by then-President Taylor, and the Ducor Broadcasting Corporation, which was privately owned but supplied with a generator by President Taylor. LCN closed down after Taylor's August 11 departure from office. Ducor radio FM101 and television closed during the June-August fighting and resumed broadcasting after the fighting.

With some notable exceptions, government officials reluctantly tolerated the press; however, they frequently criticized the media publicly for what they considered negative reporting. Requirements for foreign journalists, including a minimum

72-hour advance notice of the intent to enter the country and a 24-hour waiting period for accreditation after arrival remained in force. During the crisis, international correspondents were charged frequent and irregular accreditation fees. In mid-June, the Government suspended all foreign press credentials for 2 days in response to an article accusing then-President Taylor of "returning to cannibalism." The Government attempted to intimidate some journalists during that period. The government order that required local journalists to clear reporting on the insurgency prior to publication, generally was obeyed out of fear of government retribution.

From July until year's end, government cooperation with the media, particularly the international media, improved. The Government permitted a significant volume of reporting on the crisis with little censorship. However, local media did not publish during this period. Following President Taylor's resignation, local press returned to publishing and broadcasting, and government harassment and interference was significantly reduced from earlier in the year.

In January, there were reports that ATU forces tortured into a coma Throble Suah, a reporter for the Liberian Inquirer newspaper. He was evacuated out of the country for medical treatment. No action was taken against members of the security forces who were responsible.

Prior to July, reporting that criticized the Government generally had brought threats of violence, closure, or directives from powerful government officials to advertisers that they should discontinue business with that media

outlet.

Security personnel sometimes interpreted criticism as a license to harass, threaten, arrest, and even assault targeted persons; the Government often required arrested journalists to apologize in writing prior to releasing them. There were fewer such reports during the second half of the year.

In January, the Justice Ministry held the Manager of Radio Veritas, Ledgerhood Rennie, for several hours because his station held a live interview with opposition leader Charles Brumskine from abroad.

In May, the Government closed six local FM radio stations in the central part of the country without proffering specific charges against them.

Journalists practiced self-censorship; however, reporting of issues increased during the second half of the year.

During the year, security personnel visited Sabanoh Printing Press and prevented the publication of newspaper stories, which it considered critical. The premises of leading independent newspapers were vandalized by government troops during the recent conflict.

The Government did not specifically restrict or limit access to the Internet; it was available to those who could afford it. Several Internet cafes operated in Monrovia, although relatively high fees limited access. Prior to President Taylor's resignation, the Government continued to charge that opponents used the Internet to wage a propaganda war. However, the Ministry of Information also maintained an unofficial website that promoted a pro-government view of the country. Two Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operated in Monrovia and both were linked to prominent persons. Some persons believed that government security personnel monitored the Internet, particularly e-mail.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom. UL did not open for the fall session due to the crisis. Alphonse Nimene, president of the Student Union, 15 student leaders, and numerous other students returned to the country after the inauguration of the Transitional government in October.

There were several attacks on the press during the year by unknown persons. For example, on June 5, armed men assaulted and robbed The News reporter Stanley McGill. A week earlier, three armed men who appeared to be wearing ATU uniforms assaulted him.

On June 12, alleged LURD rebels abducted three journalists, Bobby Tapson and Bill Jarkloh, both of the The News, and Joe Watson of the Liberia Broadcasting System. The three men were reported released several days later.

On June 12, armed men looted the home of Independent journalist Lyndon Ponnle. The whereabouts of his family was unknown at year's end.

The MFWA reported that the homes of three other journalists had been looted and set ablaze in June.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the Government at times limited this right in practice. During the second half of the year, neither President Blah nor the NTGL limited gatherings, and few of such gatherings occurred.

The Government generally permitted demonstrations during the year. However, in June and July, as the crisis in Monrovia worsened, there were a number of spontaneous demonstrations that the Government tried to forcibly prevent. There were also several clashes between demonstrators seeking peace and international assistance, and pro-government demonstrators. On July 3, anti-Taylor demonstrators rallied outside a foreign Embassy. Government security services clashed with some of the demonstrators to prevent them from moving to the Embassy, and beat some civilians.

Police forcibly dispersed demonstrations during the year (see Section 2.c.).

No action was taken against security forces who forcibly dispersed demonstrating students and beat them in October 2002.

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There were 18 political parties registered by year's end. Dozens of civil society organizations, organized around themes such as human rights, women's issues, development objectives, poverty alleviation, health concerns, and worker's associations were active.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some exceptions.

In December 2002, the Government arrested Brother David Kiazolu and Reverend Christopher Toe, the Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary General respectively, of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL) and charged them with possessing e-mails from the LURD. They were held incommunicado for 2 weeks. On January 8, the two were charged with treason. They were subsequently pardoned and released in May.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the Government; however, traditional indigenous religious groups were not required to register, and generally did not register. Registration was routine, and there have been no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory in its administration.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of discrimination against Muslims. Although there were some Muslims in senior government positions, many Muslims believed that they were bypassed for desirable jobs because of their religion. Many Muslim business proprietors believed that the Government's decision to enforce an old statute prohibiting business on Sunday discriminated against them.

In April, the Government banned street preaching by evangelists and church leaders in Monrovia. The ban was not in effect at year's end.

Some tensions existed between the major religious communities. The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gave preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances, and discrimination against followers of other organized religions affected areas of individual opportunity and employment. There was an interfaith council that brought together leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Ethnic tensions continued in Lofa County between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group

Little reliable information was readily available about traditions associated with ritualistic killings in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals were removed from the victim; however, they continued to occur. The number of such killings was difficult to ascertain, since police often described deaths as accidents even when body parts were removed. It was believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups concentrated in the southeastern counties most commonly engaged in ritual killings. The victims were usually members of the religious group performing the ritual, and body parts removed from a member whom the group believed to be powerful were considered to be the most effective ritually. The rituals involved have been reported in some cases to entail eating body parts, and the underlying religious beliefs may be related to incidents during the civil war in which faction leaders sometimes ate body parts of former leaders of rival factions. Ritual killings for the purpose of obtaining body parts traditionally were committed by religious group members called "heart men;" however, since the 1990-96 civil war, common criminals also may have sold body parts.

On March 4, citizens of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County held a mass demonstration to protest the rising rate of mysterious disappearances and ritualistic killings in the county. The demonstration later turned into a riot in which several persons were injured and SOD police officers arrested and detained scores of others. The spate of ritualistic killings that sparked the riots included the killings of a 3-year-old girl, Maryemmue Saelekon of Moore Town; Government Morning school teacher Abraham Sarkpah of Harlandsville; Buchanan Port Watchman Sundaygar Duo; and the killings of citizens Binda Korkollie, Eric Jallah, and Nyonie Doe.

In October 2002, Nyema Brooks, Ma-Gbanni, and Dio Tyre Dennis were arrested and jailed at the Harper Central Prison in Maryland County for the alleged ritualistic killing of 11th grade student Dio Dennis. Dio Tyre Dennis was the father of the deceased. Dennis' body was found with several body parts removed, including his eyes. After MODEL captured Harper in May, whereabouts of the three were unknown.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights; however, government elements, the LURD, and MODEL restricted them in practice. Government security forces, LURD, and MODEL maintained checkpoints where travelers routinely were subjected to arbitrary searches and petty extortion; there were some reports that members of the SOD raped persons at checkpoints. Government security forces, LURD, and MODEL were also accused of beating and robbing IDPs fleeing fighting throughout the country.

MODEL Rebels enforced a strict curfew from 4 p.m. to 7 a.m. in Buchanan. The rebels registered citizens and refused to allow many to leave.

In October, President Blah suspended the requirement of exit visas for citizens to leave the country. Passport services remained partially suspended during the year. Prospective travelers were able to obtain passports through irregular means, such as contacting an associate of President Taylor and paying a bribe.

Relief agencies estimated that there were several hundred thousand--the numbers fluctuated throughout the year--IDPs in more than a dozen camps throughout the country. Numerous outbreaks in fighting during the year resulted in tens of thousands of persons fleeing, often more than once. Militias loyal to the Government often forcibly conscripted IDPs to fight against the LURD, and IDPs faced harassment and intimidation (see Sections 1.f. and 1.g.). An estimated 250,000 persons were living on the outskirts of Monrovia at year's end. There were also thousands of refugees in neighboring countries.

During the year, there were reports that government radio announcements of impending attacks caused large-scale displacements in Salala and Totota; however, the places often were not attacked following the announcement, and security forces looted the abandoned homes.

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government provided temporary protection to nearly 20,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were from Sierra Leone. Between 10,000 to 15,000 refugees from Sierra Leone repatriated during the year. The Government generally cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees; however, government elements, LURD, and MODEL allegedly were responsible for hundreds of cases of abuse against individual refugees (see Sections 1.b. and 1.g.).

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for the right to vote in free and fair elections, and citizens exercised this right in 1997 in elections that international observers deemed administratively free and transparent; however, the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, because most voters believed that military forces loyal to Taylor would have resumed the civil war if he lost. Since his election in 1997, President Taylor used intimidation, patronage, and corruption to maintain power. Because the legislative elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, Taylor's NPP won control of the legislature by the same 75 percent majority that he received in the popular vote for the presidency. There was widespread belief in the country and the international community that conditions did not exist for free and fair elections, which were previously scheduled to occur in October. Under the CPA, elections are scheduled for October 2005.

The CPA, negotiated between the warring parties, the registered political parties, and representatives from civil society, was designed to end several years of active conflict primarily between the Government and the LURD. As a political compromise, the CPA suspends certain articles of the Constitution temporarily, but states that articles not in conflict with the CPA remain in effect. The president and vice president roles are replaced by a chairman and vice chairman, and ministries are apportioned based on political affiliation. The executive branch is headed by a Chairman and Vice Chairman. Ministerial positions are apportioned between members of the former warring parties, the registered political parties and civil society. The NTGL has a unicameral legislature, the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA). On October 14, the Congress was replaced by the unicameral NTLA, and Bryant assumed the role of Chairman.

Under the Taylor administration, the legislature did not appear to exercise genuine independence from the

executive branch. There were 16 opposition parties, most of which had little popular support outside of the capital, and opposition legislators, who held only one-quarter of the seats in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, generally were more passive than members of the ruling NPP. Congressional committees failed to develop expertise in their respective areas of responsibility.

Constitutionally the Senate must approve presidential nominees; however, the confirmation process lagged substantially behind the appointments themselves and often appointees served months in their positions prior to confirmation. However, since the NTGL, this portion of the Constitution was suspended.

The State is highly centralized. The President appoints the superintendents (governors) of the 15 counties. Municipalities and chieftaincies were supposed to elect their own officials; however, elections--postponed in 1998 due to lack of funds and disorganization and scheduled to be held during the year--were not held. Local governments had no independent revenue base and relied entirely on the central Government for funds. Education, health services, and public works were provided by the central Government. Local officials served mainly to lobby the central Government.

There were no restrictions on the participation of women in politics, and several women held ranking positions in the Government and the NTGL. There were 4 women in the 76-seat legislature, and 3 women cabinet Ministers.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, under the Taylor administration, members of the security forces frequently harassed NGO members and democracy and human rights activists. There was generally cooperation between the NTGL and NGOs, although certain Ministries, acting independently have been less cooperative, such as over-billing them for their phone charges.

Domestic human rights organizations were under funded and understaffed, and their personnel lacked adequate training. There were three coalitions of human rights groups: The National Human Rights Center of Liberia had nine member organizations; eight other groups comprised the Network of Human Rights Chapters; and four belonged to the Federation of Human Rights Organizations. These organizations sought to increase public discussion of human rights problems.

Some human rights groups paid regular visits to detainees at police headquarters and prisoners at the Monrovia Central Prison (see Section 1.c.). Several domestic human rights organizations established branches outside of the capital and perform similar monitoring functions there. There was no pattern of government interference with these activities.

Members of government security forces, LURD, and MODEL frequently harassed members of NGOs and democracy and human rights activists. For example, in June, unidentified assailants assaulted and sexually abused three nieces of Ishmael P. Campbell, a human rights advocate and Vice President of the Liberia Bar Association. Campbell's home was also looted, forcing him to go into hiding.

In July, the Government pardoned human rights activist Aloysius Toe.

The staff of the National Human Rights Center resumed operations after the departure of Charles Taylor, and operated unhindered at year's end.

The Government permitted international NGOs and human rights organizations to operate in the country, and a number of international organizations did so during the year. Visiting observers and local employees monitored the situation and reported their findings openly.

The National Human Rights Commission remained inactive during the year.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion; however, discrimination existed. There were no laws against gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination,

or FGM. Differences involving ethnic groups, notably the Krahn, Mano, Gio, Lorma and Mandingo ethnic groups, continued to contribute to serious political violence and abuses.

Women

Domestic violence against women was widespread; however, the Government, the courts, the media, LURD, or MODEL did not seriously address it as a problem. Several NGOs in Monrovia and Buchanan continued programs to treat abused women and girls and increase awareness of their rights.

FGM traditionally was performed on young girls in northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. Prior to the onset of the civil war in 1989, approximately 50 percent of women in rural areas between the ages of 8 and 18 were subjected to FGM. Social structures and traditional institutions, such as the secret societies that often performed FGM as an initiation rite, were undermined by the war. While many experts believed that the incidence of FGM dropped to as low as 10 percent. Traditional societies were reestablishing themselves throughout the country, and the practice of FGM continued. The most extreme form of FGM, infibulation, was not practiced. The Government took no action against FGM during the year. The Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL) also spoke out against FGM.

Women never recovered from the setbacks caused by the 1990-96 war, when many schools were closed and they were prevented from maintaining their traditional roles in the production, allocation, and sale of food. The intensification of fighting between the Government, LURD, and MODEL during the year, further setback women, as thousands were again displaced and prevented from pursuing livelihoods or education.

Women married under civil law can inherit land and property; however, women married under traditional laws were considered the properties of their husbands and were not entitled to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children if their husbands die. The Government prohibits polygamy; however, traditional laws permit men to have more than one wife. Women's organizations, particularly AFELL, continued to press for legislation on behalf of inheritance rights in traditional marriages. The Liberian chapter of the Mano River Women's Peace Network visited neighboring countries in 2002 to promote regional peace and stability.

During the year, professional women's groups--including lawyers, market women, and businesswomen--remained vocal about their concerns regarding government corruption, the economy, security abuses, rape, domestic violence, and children's rights. Government officials often responded negatively to public criticism.

Children

The Government generally was unable to provide for the education and health of children. Due to the poor condition of government schools, many children who attended school, particularly in Monrovia, went to private institutions. Since many private schools still needed to be refurbished due to wartime damage, school fees remained relatively high, thereby making education unattainable for many school-age children. In both public and private schools, families of children often were asked to provide their own books, pencils, paper, and even desks. In November, UNICEF launched a "Back to School" campaign, which began when schools in Monrovia opened for the first time since the June fighting, and provided books, pens, and other teaching materials to children. In 2001 1.05 million out of an estimated 1.7 million school-age children, less than half of whom were girls, were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Expenditures on education were estimated at \$2.4 million (167 million Id). In 2000 the literacy rate was 70 percent for boys and 37 percent for girls.

FGM was performed primarily on young girls (see Section 5, Women).

Child prostitution and trafficking was a problem (see Section 6.f.).

Government and rebel forces forcibly conscripted persons, including children, to serve as porters, forced laborers, combatants, and sex slaves. There were credible reports that the commanders of these children used narcotics and cocaine to induce the children to fight and to kill. The various armed militias continued to recruit forcibly from IDP camps and schools and deploy underage soldiers, including girls. Some children were as young as 9 years old. There were an estimated 15,000 child soldiers in the country. UNICEF reported that in some factions, 70 percent of combatants were children. In June, government forces attempted to forcibly conscript dozens of young men from the streets of Monrovia, and take them to military camps where they were to be armed and sent to fight. There were credible reports that the LURD engaged in similar forced recruitment and deployment tactics. Thousands of child soldiers have yet to be demobilized or disarmed.

Child labor was a problem (see Section 6.d.).

There were thousands of children living on the street of Monrovia; however, it is difficult to tell who were street children, ex-combatants, or IDPs. Approximately 100 under-funded orphanages operated in and around Monrovia; however, many orphans lived outside these institutions. These institutions did not receive any government funding, but relied on private donations. Nearly all youths witnessed terrible atrocities, and some committed atrocities themselves.

Persons with Disabilities

As a result of the civil wars, a large number of persons had permanent disabilities, in addition to those disabled by accident or illness. It is illegal to discriminate against persons with disabilities; however, in practice they did not enjoy equal access to public buildings or government services. No laws mandate accessibility to public buildings or services. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination, particularly in rural areas. Babies with deformities often were abandoned. Some NGOs provided services to persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the Constitution prohibits ethnic discrimination, it also provides that only "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent" may be citizens or own land. Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or have lived most of their lives in the country were denied full rights as a result of this racial distinction.

The country was ethnically diverse and has 16 indigenous ethnic groups. The indigenous ethnic groups generally spoke distinct primary languages and were concentrated regionally. No ethnic group constituted a majority of the population.

During the Taylor administration, Mandingo citizens faced growing discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence based on their ethnicity (see Section 1.b.). However, during the year, the Mandingo dominated LURD was in control of Lofa country and portions of Bong and Nimba countries, allowing some Mandingos to return to the country.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides workers, except members of the military and police, the right to associate in trade unions, and workers exercised this right in practice. The Constitution also provides that unions are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity; however, government interference in union activities, especially union elections and leadership struggles, was common both before and during the civil war.

Although most economic activity was interrupted by the conflict, unions proliferated. There were approximately 30 functioning unions organized loosely under two-umbrella groups, the Liberian Federation of Labor Unions (LFLU) and the Congress of Liberian Trade Unions (CLTU), with the common objective of protecting the rights of their 60,000 members, who largely were unemployed. The actual power that the unions exercised was extremely limited. Since the country's work force largely was illiterate, economic activities beyond the subsistence level were very limited, and the labor laws tended to favor management.

During the year, the Government strictly enforced the union registration requirements that fell into disuse during the war. Applicants needed to register at two different ministries, and processing time was arbitrary. Some groups received official status in only a few days while the Government never issued registration for others.

The law does not prohibit anti-union discrimination; however, under the Taylor administration, there were discriminations against union activities.

Labor unions traditionally have been affiliated with international labor groups such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

With the exception of civil servants, workers (including employees of public corporations and autonomous agencies) have the right to organize and bargain collectively. These rights largely were unused during the year because of the lack of economic activity.

Labor laws provide for the right to strike. The laws were nullified by a 1984 People's Redemption Council decree that outlawed strikes, but that decree has not been enforced for years. Due to the destruction of the economy and the estimated 80 percent unemployment rate, strikes were infrequent.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, this prohibition was ignored widely in many parts of the country, and there were reports such practices occurred (see Section 6.d.). In some rural areas, farmers were pressured into providing free labor on "community projects" that often benefited only local leaders. There were allegations that large logging companies and mining companies forcibly recruited workers. There also were reports that local officials forced convicts to work for them.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that local government officials coerced persons to work without compensation on President Taylor's farm or that security forces forced persons to dig for diamonds and gold. Allegedly, LURD and MODEL rebels have used forced labor to dig gold and diamonds in their controlled territories during the year.

There were reports that LURD rebels forced civilians into service as porters for LURD ammunition and supplies in Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties (see Section 1.b.). In Gbarnga, there were reports that local LURD commanders forced women to harvest rice from local farms for LURD generals.

LURD and MODEL rebels also forcibly conscripted children to fight as child soldiers (see Section 5).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 during school hours in the wage sector, but enforcement was lax and child labor was a serious and widespread problem. The Ministry of Labor frequently lacked the resources to carry out its mandate. Throughout rural areas, particularly where there were no schools, small children continued to assist their parents as vendors in local markets or on the streets, to take care of younger brothers and sisters, and to work on family subsistence farms.

Some former combatants, including some in the security forces, were accused of forcing children to work in the mining industry. Human rights groups reported instances of forced child labor in some rural areas, particularly in alluvial diamond mining. A child rights advocacy group's report on child labor in the southeastern counties and that of another prominent human rights group contradicted a government report, issued in 2002, which concluded that there was no conclusive evidence of forced child labor. Subsequently legislators from three counties sued the child rights advocacy group for defaming the counties' reputations. At year's end, the case remained pending.

All existing military groups have abducted or otherwise compelled large numbers of children to serve as soldiers, sex slaves, and in other service capacities (see Section 5).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law provides for a minimum wage, paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely against profitable firms that generally observed these standards. Due to the country's continued economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions. The Ministry of Labor claimed it lacked the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws.

The law requires a minimum wage of approximately \$0.25 (10 Id) per hour not exceeding 8 hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The law requires that agricultural workers be paid \$1.00 (60 Id) for an 8-hour day, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, but industrial workers usually received three or four times the wage paid to agricultural workers. The highly competitive minimum wage jobs provided a minimal standard of living for a worker and family; however, there were very few such jobs. Families dependent on minimum wage incomes also engaged in subsistence farming, small-scale marketing, petty extortion, and begging.

Civil Servants salaries were in arrears for anywhere from 10 to 24 months, depending on the Ministry. The NTGL paid salaries for October, November and December; however, the arrears were not paid by year's end.

The law provides for a 48-hour, 6-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period per 5 hours of work. The 6-day workweek may extend to 56 hours for service occupations and to 72 hours for miners, with overtime pay beyond 48 hours.

There were government-established health and safety standards that the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing; however, the Ministry rarely enforced them. The law does not give workers the right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

The law protects legal, but not illegal, foreign workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were reports that persons were trafficked to, from, and within the country. There were reports of forced labor, including by children, and the recruitment of child soldiers (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.d.). Citizens, including children, have been trafficked to the Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and the United Kingdom, in some cases for commercial sexual exploitation.